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United States Environmental Protection Agency

About EPA

EPA to Launch Noise Control Program

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NOTE: In the past, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) coordinated all federal noise control activities through its Office of Noise Abatement and Control. However, In 1981, the Administration at that time concluded that noise issues were best handled at the State or local government level. As a result, the EPA phased out the office's funding in 1982 as part of a shift in federal noise control policy to transfer the primary responsibility of regulating noise to state and local governments. However, the Noise Control Act of 1972 and the Quiet Communities Act of 1978 were not rescinded by Congress and remain in effect today, although essentially unfunded. View more information about noise pollution from EPA's Office of Air and Radiation and in our Frequently Questions database.

[EPA press release - November 6, 1972]

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced today that a major study of airport noise and the development of noise standards for trains and motor carriers in interstate commerce would be the first action programs under new authorities given EPA by the Noise Control Act of 1972.

Commenting on the new law, EPA Administrator William D. Ruckelshaus said, "We now have the authority to come to grips with an environmental problem that affects millions of people. The previous lack of this power represented a serious gap in our environmental authorities."

The new legislation which was signed by President Nixon on October 28th gives EPA the primary role for controlling environmental noise. It was submitted to Congress in 1971 as part of the Administration's environmental "package."

Under the new authorities, EPA has the responsibility for coordinating all Federal programs in noise research and control. EPA must be consulted by other Federal agencies prior to publishing new regulations on noise. If the agency feels that any proposed new or existing Federal regulations do not adequately protect the public health and welfare, it can call for public review of them. Citizen suits are also authorized.

EPA also has the authority to set standards for any product or class of products which have been identified as a major source of noise. They would be based on criteria which EPA is required to develop before proposing any standards.

Categories of equipment covered by the legislation include construction, transportation (including recreational vehicles), motors or engines, and electrical and electronic.

The Federal Aviation Agency retains authority to set aircraft noise regulations, but EPA is required to recommend to FAA any regulations it feels are necessary. To fulfill this responsibility, EPA, working with representatives of the Departments of Commerce (including the National Bureau of Standards), Defense, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, will make a major study of existing airport flight and operational control regulations. Working groups will look at five major areas: existing legislation and institutions; source abatement technology and costs; methods of characterizing the problem; present and proposed FAA regulations; and airport operations including monitoring, enforcement, safety, and costs.

The results of this study, which is scheduled to be completed within nine months, will be contained in a special report to the Congress and in proposed regulations to the FAA.

In the consumer area, EPA has authority to label products as to their noise-generating characteristics or their effectiveness in reducing noise. The standard-setting and labeling authorities apply to both domestic and imported products.

Manufacturers or importers of non-conforming or mis-labeled products are subject to fines of up to \$25,000 per day for each violation and to imprisonment of up to one year. Manufacturers must issue warrants that their regulated products are in compliance at time of sale. They are also required to maintain records and provide information, including supplying products coming off the assembly line for testing, to EPA if requested.

EPA is also authorized to conduct research, technical assistance, and public information and certify low-noise emission products for purchase by the Federal Government.